

Update on the report “Securing the Future of Public Sport and Leisure Services”

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

On 14th September 2021 the LGA in partnership with the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) and the Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association (CLOA) launched the jointly commissioned report “Securing the Future of Public Sport and Leisure Services” in parliament.

The report represents the views of local government, leisure providers and wider key stakeholders on the key actions and changes that are needed at national and local level so that public sport and leisure services can operate sustainably and deliver the best outcomes for communities.

Is this report confidential? Yes ☐ No ☒

Recommendation/s

This update report is for information. Board members are asked to note the paper.

Action/s

Officers to note any comments from the Board.

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Update on the report “Securing the Future of Public Sport and Leisure Services”

Background

1. This report was commissioned under the 2020/21 Board cycle. It was jointly commissioned and funded by the LGA, APSE and CLOA to reflect the need to align and strengthen the sector’s voice in order to improve its reach and influence at national level.
2. The report sets out two key asks of Government and seven recommendations to enable public sport and leisure services to be able to operate sustainably and deliver the best outcomes for communities..
3. The recommendations and asks are based on the findings from a comprehensive consultation which sought the views from over 250 participants including representatives from local government, leisure providers and wider key stakeholders.

Key findings

4. Our research identified the following key findings:
 - That fundamental systemic issues with the funding of public sector sports and leisure provision have been building over the past decade and have been hugely exacerbated as a result of COVID-19.
 - Councils play a central leadership role in creating active places, connecting diverse Government objectives through planning, active travel schemes, parks and playground provision, and their leisure facilities
 - Public sport and leisure services are unique for their reach and support for communities, providing lifelong opportunities for all to be active, especially in some of the most deprived communities.
 - Public sport and leisure services are integral to COVID-19 recovery supporting communities to recover and helping relieve pressures on NHS and social care services.
 - Community sport and physical activity development is essential in expanding the reach of services and helping to address health inequalities.
 - Public sport and leisure services are under immediate risk of operational failure and face critical long-term damage without immediate further support.
 - The public provision of swimming facilities and the need to reach the levels of swimming attainment in the national curriculum cannot be fulfilled by private operators. It is essential for ensuring tens of thousands of primary school children, particularly in more deprived areas, learn important water safety skills and learn to swim each year.
 - Ageing leisure assets make a significant contribution to carbon emissions, and investment in decarbonising assets can help to meet net-zero targets and reduce running costs in the longer term
 - The voice of the public sport and leisure sector is fragmented, which has weakened its ability to influence at local and national level.

- Investment in leadership and skills development is required across leisure and health partners to develop the services needed by communities in the future, support collaboration and drive further integration of services.

Report recommendations

5. Our two key asks of Government are:

1. The new Office for Health Improvement and Disparities should take responsibility for embedding the strategic role of public sport and leisure services within health systems and pathways, coordinating with DCMS, MHCLG and local government within England. All nations should consider how best to coordinate public sport and leisure provision across differing departments of Government
2. A £1 billion capital investment into the leisure estate based on established design plans would help to create hundreds of construction jobs, improve efficiency, reduce climate emissions and boost usage. Longer term, it would create new job opportunities and apprenticeships in areas of the sport and leisure industry typically taken by young people.

6. Our seven recommendations are:

1. Department for Media, Culture and Sport (DCMS) should establish a programme for public sport and leisure services equivalent to its 'Valuing culture and heritage assets capital: a framework towards informing decision making' programme. The new programme should make statistics and evidence publicly available to aid the articulation of the value of public sport and leisure services locally and nationally in line with Her Majesty's Treasury (HMT) Green Book.
2. DCMS and MHCLG should work in partnership with local government to build a robust case for the sustainable investment in public sport and leisure services, to be put forward to HMT for the Comprehensive Spending Review 2021. It should recognise the wider policy objectives that these services contribute to, and be supported by the new Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), the Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England in recognition of the critical role public sport and leisure services play in addressing their objectives.
3. The DfE should work with Government departments and councils to map the provision of swimming facilities and levels of curriculum attainment, investing to address gaps or future gaps in the system and making targeted support available to enable schools to invest in learn to swim and swim safety where the system is currently failing.
4. Councils should consider what social value outcomes they want to achieve through public sport and leisure services and design services accordingly,

including activities such as outreach work to support those who are most vulnerable. These objectives must also be fully embedded into procurement activity and contract management processes.

5. Sport England (and other devolved administrations and sports councils), UK Active and Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA) should work together, with other key partners, to provide professional development opportunities that meet the future skills needs in a post-COVID-19 world. This should consider what is needed to tackle inequalities in access, including the implications of digital inequalities.
6. Investment should be made available to enable relevant bodies across the UK such as Sport England, the LGA, CLOA and APSE alongside other UK administrative bodies for sport and leisure to provide leadership development for portfolio holders and officers at a strategic and democratic governance level. A key element of the programme should be supporting elected members and officers to make the linkages with the wider system, including health systems.
7. The Local Government Physical Activity Partnership (LGPAP) should enhance its capacity, increase its visibility and engagement with the Government, and accelerate its work.

Next steps

7. Following the successful launch of the report in parliament on 14 September 2021, we will continue to promote the report and seek support from wider stakeholders and the Government through our ongoing lobbying work.
8. The Summary report can be found here: <https://www.local.gov.uk/securing-future-public-sport-and-leisure-services>